

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 01125 161527Z
ACTION A-01

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 H-03 SS-07 NSC-06 CCO-00 /024 W
-----161532Z 064648 /46

P 161358Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 744

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: OREP (CODEL SLACK)
SUBJECT: CALL BY CODEL SLACK ON PRESIDENT LAKAS

1. CONGRESSIONAL AND STAFF MEMBERS OF CODEL SLACK CALLED ON PRESIDENT AND MRS. LAKAS AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE AT 10:00 A.M. FEBRUARY 15. MRS. LAKAS ENTERTAINED THE WOMEN, EXCEPT CONGRESSWOMAN BURKE, WHO NATURALLY STAYED IN THE GROUP WITH PRESIDENT LAKAS. PRESIDENT LAKAS IS A CHARMING GENTLEMAN WITH A FLAWLESS TEXAS ACCENT, AND HE MADE AN EFFECTIVE APPEAL TO THE GROUP FOR UNDERSTANDING OF THE PANAMANIAN POSITION.

2. THE CENTRAL FOCUS OF HIS REMARKS WAS A NOTE OF CONFIDENCE THAT THE U.S. WILL BE FAIR IN ITS DEALINGS WITH SMALL COUNTRIES SUCH AS PANAMA. HE SAID THAT THE U.S. IS NEGOTIATING A TREATY NOT ONLY WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA BUT WITH AN ENTIRE PEOPLE, SINCE THIS IS AN ISSUE WHICH UNITES ALL PANAMANIAN. DESPITE UNANIMOUS OPINION AMONG PANAMANIAN THAT THE U.S. SHOULD ADJUST ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH PANAMA, HE SAID, THERE IS VERY LITTLE ANTI-AMERICANISM IN THIS COUNTRY. THE VIETNAM ANALOGY WHICH SOME USE IN DESCRIBING THE PANAMA SITUATION IS NOT APPLICABLE, HE SAID. PANAMA HAS NEVER DAMAGED THE CANAL, HE SAID, AND THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE IT WOULD EVER DO SO IN THE FUTURE.

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PAGE 02 PANAMA 01125 161527Z

3. PRESIDENT LAKAS NOTED THAT HIS COUNTRY IS SPLIT IN TWO BY THE ZONE, OVER WHICH THE U.S. HAS JURISDICTION. HE ASKED THOSE AMERICANS PRESENT HOW THEY WOULD FEEL IF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER WERE UNDER PANAMANIAN JURISDICTION. AGAIN HE REVERTED TO HIS APPEAL TO THE BASIC FAIRNESS OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

4. BEHIND THE PRESIDENT'S DOWN-HOME GENIALITY AND AREASONABLE-
NESS LAY A CERTAIN HINT THAT IF A JUST TREATY IS NOT AGREED
TO, THERE MAY BE TROUBLE. "THIS LITTLE KETTLE IS
BOILING, BOILING," HE SAID. OUTSIDERS MIGHT TAKE
ADVANTAGE OF DISCONTENT TO CAUSE TROUBLE, HE SAID.
WHY DON'T WE JUST REASON THIS OUT TOGETHER?

5. ASKED WHETHER THE TIME IS RIPE FOR A TREATY
NOW, LAKAS SAID THAT PANAMA IS NOT ASKING FOR IMMEDIATE
CONTROL OF THE CANAL. RATHER, HE SAID, IT WANTS
A GRADUAL TURNOVER OF CERTAIN AREAS AND RESPONSIBILITIES,
FOLLOWED BY COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE CANAL BY THE YEAR 2000.
"WHO KNOWS WHAT THE WORLD WILL BE LIKE IN 2000?", HE
ASKED, SUGGESTING THAT THE CANAL MIGHT WELL NOT FULLFILL
THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD AT THAT FUTURE DATE.

6. MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION DISCUSSED THE NEED
FOR A MEDIA CAMPAIGN IN THE U.S. ON THE PANAMA
ISSUE. SOME OF THEM NOTED THE DEPTH OF OPPOSITION TO
A NEW TREATY IN THEIR DISTRICTS. PRESIDENT LAKAS
RESPONDED THAT HE AGREED THE PROBLEM LAY WITH A LACK
OF INFORMATION OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, AND THAT
WHEN THEY COME TO UNDERSTAND IT, THEY WILL BE FAIR WITH
PANAMA. ONE MEMBER OF THE GROUP POINTED OUT THAT THE
DETENTION OF A CANAL ZONE RESIDENT AT TOCUMEN AIRPORT
FEBRUARY 11 HAD GIVEN PANAMA JUST THE TYPE OF PUBLICITY
THAT NO ONE NEEDS, GIVING OPPONENTS AN OPPORTUNITY
TO ALLEGE TORTURE AND BAD TREATMENT OF PRISONERS IN PANAMA.
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PAGE 03 PANAMA 01125 161527Z

LAKAS RESPONDED THAT THE INDIVIDUAL IN
QUESTION, WILLIAM DRUMMOND, WAS QUESTIONED IN THE
PRESENCE OF A CANAL ZONE OFFICIAL, WAS NOT ABUSED IN
ANY WAY, AND WAS RELEASED IN LESS THAN THREE
HOURS. HE SAID THERE WAS NO TORTURE IN PANAMA.

7. THE COVERSAATION WITH PRESIDENT LAKAS LASTED
APPROXIMATELY 90 MINUTES AND WAS AMIABLE THROUGHOUT.

8. THIS CABLE HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
CHAIRMAN SLACK.
JORDEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 16-Feb-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PANAMA01125
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770055-0483
Format: TEL
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770236/aaaabfpc.tel
Line Count: 109
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: a2e9a1c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION A
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3306379
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CALL BY CODEL SLACK ON PRESIDENT LAKAS
TAGS: OREP, (SLACK, JOHN M)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a2e9a1c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009